

## golden jubilee of Durham Crematorium

Durham Crematorium opened in August 1960. It was one of 17 crematoria to open in Great Britain that year – the most new sites in any twelve month period before or since. The Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee, which has been responsible for the operation of the crematorium since its inception, agreed that the 50th anniversary should be marked in a number of ways; that the Superintendent & Registrar, Alan José should research and write a booklet outlining the history of the crematorium, that two memorial services take place and that a dinner be held. The focus of these events was to be the weekend of Friday 6th - Sunday 8th August 2010.

First the grand dinner took place on the 6th of August at County Hall in Durham City where 170 guests including funeral directors, clergy, funeral celebrants, doctors, organists and crematorium staff joined the guests of honour to mark the Golden Jubilee. The guests of honour were: Chairman of Durham County Council Mr Mac Williams & Pauline Adams, Councillor Isobel Mattick - President Federation of Burial & Cremation Authorities, Mr Rick Powell - Secretary of Federation of Burial & Cremation Authorities, Mr Roger Arber & Mrs Irene Arber - Secretary Cremation Society of Gt. Britain, Mr Martin & Mrs Denise Birch - Immediate Past President of the ICCM, Councillor Maria Plews & Mr Brian Plews - Chairman of CDCJC, Deputy Mayor of Durham - Mr Les Thompson & Mrs Thompson, Ms Janet Officer – Chairman British Institute of Embalmers N.E. and the Mayor of Spennymoor - Mr John Parkin & Mrs Julie Parkin.



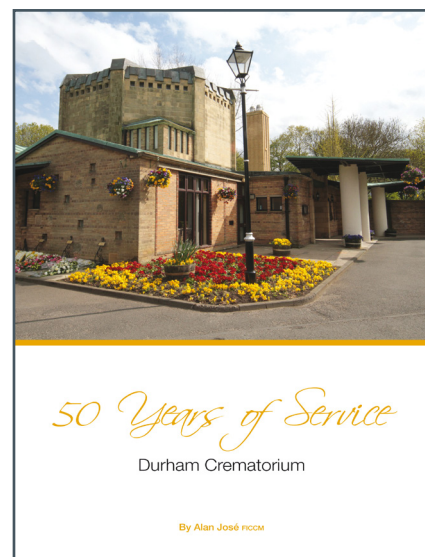
The Chairman of the County Council gave a brief history of the crematorium and of his own involvement with the building in his pre-retirement role as Health & Safety Officer and welcomed all the guests. Councillor Maria Plews (Chairman of Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee) outlined the plans for the future including installation of new cremators and mercury abatement plant. Councillor Isobel Mattick, President of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities responded on behalf of the guests, pictured above. A very enjoyable evening was had by all and the last of the stragglers were seen departing County Hall at midnight.

Before they left each guest received a copy of the comprehensive and well produced 24 page 50th Anniversary Booklet researched and written by Alan José. In the forward to the booklet Professor Hilary J. Grainger, author of *Death Redesigned: British Architecture and Landscape (Reading 2006)*, describes the crematorium thus:

"Durham Crematorium is linked to those communities [it serves] by something much stronger than utilitarian purpose. It offers not only a beautiful natural landscape within which to remember the dead, but has, over time, emerged as a piece of regional history and culture. As such, Durham Crematorium occupies a well-deserved and dignified place in the life of the region."

The booklet goes on to chart the history of the crematorium – built at a cost of £62,799. 9s .0d (£62,799.45) – with archive photographs and press cuttings. The adult cremation fee on opening was £6. 6s. 0d (£6.30); in the first year 375 cremations took place. Twenty-four years later the two original cremators were replaced and, whilst works were in progress, the opportunity taken to install a new central heating system replacing the original inefficient electric under floor heating. Alan continues through the decades bringing the reader right up to date as he highlights all the major changes that have taken place and the enhancements made to the building and grounds to improve the visitor experience and comply with ever-changing legislation and greater public awareness and expectation.

In a personal message in the booklet Chairman of the Joint Committee, Cllr. Maria Plews, states, "There have been many challenges along the way....so it is once more as the Committee has recently approved a £2.3 million scheme to install new cremators and abatement plant together with improvements to the roadways and the provision of a new and larger car park.....These works will ensure that once again Durham Crematorium will have the very latest efficient and clean cremators, and the best facilities to meet the challenges of the next 50 years."



*Reverend Ann Shepherdson, Margaret Wood (Humanist) and Reverend Keith Lumsdon*



The two memorial services were held on Saturday 7th August and Sunday 8th August and were interdenominational with representatives of the Church of England, Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches and the Humanist Society taking part. The detailed arrangements were overseen by Reverend Keith Lumsdon, Vicar of St Lukes Parish, Ferryhill and Dean for the Sedgfield Deanery. The services were well attended and the theme of thanksgiving for the lives of those cremated at Durham Crematorium and for the staff, both past and present who minister to the bereaved, was well received.

The dignitaries in attendance were the Chairman of Durham County Council - Councillor Mac Williams, the Chairman of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee - Councillor Maria Plews, the Mayor of Durham - Councillor Mamie Simmonds, the Mayor & Mayoress of Spennymoor - Councillor John Parkin and Mrs Julie Parkin and the Deputy Mayor of Durham - Councillor Les Thompson.

*Mac Williams - Chairman of Durham County Council, Stephen Tinkler - Durham's cremator technician and Pauline Adams*



*Trainee cremator operator Elizabeth Wilson with Cllr Mamie Simmonds*

